UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1998/NGO/106
6 April 1998

ENGLISH
Original: ENGLISH AND SPANISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 10

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[2 April 1998]

1. For years Pax Christi has been involved with peace initiatives undertaken by the church in Uraba, Colombia. Pax Christi encourages an international presence in the region in order to protect defenceless civilians who, in great numbers, have become the victims of violence. The violence against civilians is committed by armed groups: the paramilitary, the military and the guerrilla.

2. In March 1997, the first "peace community" was founded in San José de Apartadó (Uraba). Pax Christi was present there and has taken it upon itself to provide international support. Since then European aid has commenced and an international observer is permanently present in the area, on behalf of Pax Christi. This presence accords protection.

3. In the meantime the number of peace communities has increased to six. These communities of unarmed civilians do not allow access to any armed groups and do not have any kind of contact with them. Only in this way can the civilians regain their independence and autonomy.

4. Although respect for the peace communities by the parties in conflict is increasing, Pax Christi complains that the autonomy of the first peace community of San José de Apartadó, has been violated at various times by all the parties in conflict. Violations include forced collaboration, murder and kidnapping of unarmed civilians. Such actions violate international humanitarian law, especially the additional Protocol II to the Four Geneva Conventions. These violations have remained unpunished.

5. Pax Christi is making an appeal to the Government to punish the guilty who violated the integrity of the peace community San José de Apartadó and to the parties in conflict in Uraba - paramilitary, the military and guerrillas - to respect the integrity of all present and future peace communities.

6. Pax Christi appeals to the international community to actively support the peace communities and to send international representatives who can serve as protection to the defenceless refugees.